



**WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE**  
1156 15<sup>TH</sup> STREET, NW SUITE 915 · WASHINGTON, DC 20005 · P (202) 463-2940 · F (202) 463-2953  
E-MAIL: WASHINGTONBUREAU@NAACPNET.ORG · WEB ADDRESS WWW.NAACP.ORG

April 23, 2013

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Communications and  
Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Communications and  
Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**RE: NAACP STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE LIFELINE PROGRAM**

Dear Chairman Walden and Congresswoman Eshoo,

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization, I am writing to express our strong support for the Universal Service Fund's (USF) wireless Lifeline program.

Lifeline is a much-needed program. It is in our society's best interest to empower everyone, especially our most vulnerable citizens, with the ability to communicate with prospective and current employers, connect with emergency, health, social, and educational services, and keep in touch with family and friends. There are currently as many as 16 million low-income households who, without the Lifeline benefits, would have to choose between feeding their children and going without a dial tone that could save their lives or put them on a better economic path through employment.

Recognizing the benefits of ready communication to all Americans, the Reagan Administration and Congress first enacted the Lifeline program in 1985. In recognition of the technological shift toward and benefits of mobility, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under the George W. Bush Administration expanded the program to include wireless service in 2005. Since that time, Lifeline has provided a discount on phone service for qualifying low-income consumers to ensure that all Americans have the opportunities and security that phone service brings.

Lifeline currently serves low-income consumers in every state, territory, and commonwealth. The Lifeline program is available to consumers with an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines or who participate in a qualifying state, federal or Tribal assistance

program including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps), Section 8, LIHEAP, and the Free Lunch Program.

One participating servicer estimates that more than 80% of Lifeline subscribers in 2011 had an average household income below \$15,000; that the average age was 51; and that more than 45% of Lifeline subscribers were Caucasian compared to 40% who were African American and 7% who were Hispanic. Perhaps most startling is the fact that despite the fact that participation in the Lifeline program has increased in recent years due in large measure to the economic downturn, just half of those who qualify for Lifeline benefits actually participate.

We recognize that like many government programs, there have been instances of abuse. That is why we strongly supported the actions of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in January 2012 when they reformed and modernized the Lifeline program to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse and to improve effectiveness and to reflect the changing needs of the communities served by Lifeline including rules that have failed to keep pace as consumers increasingly choose wireless phone service.

Lifeline works: the percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80% in 1985, when Lifeline began, to nearly 92% in 2011. That is why we remain resolute in our support of the Lifeline program, and would encourage Members of Congress and the FCC to continue to support Lifeline's ability to provide both wireline and wireless phone services and we support expanding Lifeline to help support Broadband connection as well. Lifeline is an appropriately named program: it provides many Americans with a connection to employers, potential employers, emergency services, health care professionals, their children's schools, family and friends that they otherwise might have to do without.

Thank you in advance for your attention to our concerns and our strong support for the Lifeline program. If we can be of further assistance to you, or if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact at the NAACP Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Hilary O. Shelton', with a stylized, flowing script.

Hilary O. Shelton  
Director, NAACP Washington Bureau &  
Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy

cc: Members, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

